

National Trail Management Classes

Updated 6/28/2004

Trail prescriptions describe the desired management of each trail, based on Forest Plan direction. These prescriptions take into account user preferences, setting, protection of sensitive resources, and other management activities. To meet prescription, each trail is assigned an appropriate Trail Class. These general categories are used to identify applicable Trail Design Parameters and to identify basic indicators used for determining the cost to meet national quality standards.¹

The General Criteria below define each Trail Class and are applicable to all system trails. Subsequent sections provide Additional Criteria specific to Motorized Trails, Pack and Saddle Trails, Snow Trails, and Water Trails.

Trail Class descriptions define “typical” attributes, and exceptions may occur for any attribute. Apply the Trail Class that most closely matches the managed objective of the trail.

| Trail Attributes | Trail Class 1 Minimal/Undeveloped Trail | Trail Class 2 Simple/Minor Development Trail | Trail Class 3 Developed/Improved Trail | Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail | Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| General Criteria Physical Characteristics to be Applied to All National Forest System Trails | | | | | |
| Tread & Traffic Flow | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread intermittent and often indistinct ♦ May require route finding ♦ Native materials only | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread discernible and continuous, but narrow and rough ♦ Few or no allowances constructed for passing ♦ Native materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread obvious and continuous ♦ Width accommodates unhindered one-lane travel (occasional allowances constructed for passing) ♦ Typically native materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread wide and relatively smooth with few irregularities ♦ Width may consistently accommodate two-lane travel ♦ Native or imported materials ♦ May be hardened | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Width generally accommodates two-lane and two-directional travel, or provides frequent passing turnouts ♦ Commonly hardened with asphalt or other imported material |
| Obstacles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Obstacles common ♦ Narrow passages; brush, steep grades, rocks and logs present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Obstacles occasionally present ♦ Blockages cleared to define route and protect resources ♦ Vegetation may encroach into trailway | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Obstacles infrequent ♦ Vegetation cleared outside of trailway | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Few or no obstacles exist ♦ Grades typically <12% ♦ Vegetation cleared outside of trailway | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ No obstacles ♦ Grades typically <8% |

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| Trail Attributes | Trail Class 1 Minimal/Undeveloped Trail | Trail Class 2 Simple/Minor Development Trail | Trail Class 3 Developed/Improved Trail | Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail | Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| General Criteria Physical Characteristics to be Applied to All National Forest System Trails | | | | | |
| Constructed Features & Trail Elements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal to non-existent Drainage is functional No constructed bridges or foot crossings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures are of limited size, scale, and number Drainage functional Structures adequate to protect trail infrastructure and resources Primitive foot crossings and fords | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trail structures (walls, steps, drainage, raised trail) may be common and substantial Trail bridges as needed for resource protection and appropriate access Generally native materials used in Wilderness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures frequent and substantial Substantial trail bridges are appropriate at water crossings Trailside amenities may be present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures frequent or continuous; may include curbs, handrails, trailside amenities, and boardwalks Drainage structures frequent; may include culverts and road-like designs |
| Signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum required Generally limited to regulation and resource protection No destination signs present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum required for basic direction Generally limited to regulation and resource protection Typically very few or no destination signs present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulation, resource protection, user reassurance Directional signs at junctions, or when confusion is likely Destination signs typically present Informational and interpretive signs may be present outside of Wilderness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide variety of signs likely present Informational signs likely (outside of Wilderness) Interpretive signs possible (outside of Wilderness) Trail Universal Access information likely displayed at trailhead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide variety of signage is present Information and interpretive signs likely Trail Universal Access information is typically displayed at trailhead |
| Typical Recreation Environs & Experience² | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, unmodified ROS: Often Primitive setting, but may occur in other ROS settings WROS: Primitive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, essentially unmodified ROS: Typically Semi-Primitive setting WROS: Primitive to Semi-Primitive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, primarily unmodified ROS: Typically Semi-Primitive to Roaded Natural setting WROS: Semi-Primitive to Transition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be modified ROS: Typically Roaded Natural to Rural setting WROS: Transition (rarely present in Wilderness) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be highly modified ROS: Typically Rural to Urban setting Commonly associated with Visitor Centers or high-use recreation sites Not present in Wilderness |

¹ For user-specific design criteria and specifications, refer to Forest Service Handbook and other applicable agency references.

² Typical Recreation Environment & Experience descriptors are provided to assist with understanding Trail Classes. They represent typical or commonly occurring Trail Class and ROS or WROS setting combinations, but are not intended to indicate combinations that are “allowed” or “not allowed”. The appropriate Trail Class should be determined by local managers at the trail-specific level, based on Forest Plan direction and other considerations. While less developed trails may occur in any ROS setting, they typically occur in less developed ROS settings. Similarly, more highly developed trails tend to occur in more highly developed ROS settings, but may occur in less developed ROS settings (with the exception of Trail Class 5 which is not consistent with Primitive settings).

Additional Criteria

The following sections provide Additional Criteria specific to Pack and Saddle Trails, Motorized Trails, Snow Trails and Water Trails. These criteria are to be applied in addition to the General Criteria above, which are applicable to all system trails.

| Trail Attributes | Trail Class 1 Minimal/Undeveloped Trail | Trail Class 2 Simple/Minor Development Trail | Trail Class 3 Developed/Improved Trail | Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail | Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|
| Additional Criteria for Pack and Saddle Trails Apply in <u>addition</u> to Trail Class General Criteria | | | | | |
| Pack and Saddle Trails | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically, not managed for pack and saddle stock traffic Maintenance and availability likely intermittent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trailway narrow. Some brush encroachment may exist, though bump* trees are generally removed Tread surface rough, with frequent protrusions and obstacles that limit speed and maneuverability of pack and saddle stock Tread rarely or not graded. Obstacles cleared if they substantially restrict the managed use and difficulty level Tread surface commonly loose native material, such as sand, mud, rock etc. Switchbacks and turns accommodate pack stock though may require slower speeds Crossings may be wet fords if base material is stable; possibly with simple hardening or armoring for resource protection. Simple bridges present if required for resource protection. Trails have infrequent markers or route identifiers, located primarily at junctions. Signing size and type appropriate for managed speeds and use. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trail wide and suitable for pack and saddle stock to pass periodically. Occasional moderate tread protrusions and short awkward sections, which require speed adjustments Tread infrequently graded. Obstacles cleared if they substantially hinder the managed use and difficulty level. Tread surface generally native materials, with occasional on-site fill or imported materials, if more stable surface is desired. Crossings may be wet fords; likely with hardening and armoring or simple bridges for resource protection and to ensure appropriate access. Trails have frequent markers and are readily followed Signing size and type appropriate for managed uses. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trail wide and suitable for the managed use type, and may consistently accommodate two-way passage. Tread surface generally smooth with only small protrusions, which moderately affect speed and ease of travel. Tread graded as needed. Tread surface may include imported aggregate Crossings are typically either hardened or armored or a substantial bridge. Trails have frequent markers and are easily followed Signing size and type appropriate for managed uses | Not managed for Pack and Saddle Stock. |

* "Bump trees" are any trees located closely enough to the trail that they may be hit or bumped by standard-sized pack boxes carried by packstock travelling the route.

Trail Operation and Maintenance Considerations

Trail Operation and Maintenance Considerations are intended to complement the National Trail Class General Criteria. These considerations can be regarded as general guidelines to assist in developing trail prescriptions, and subsequent program management, operations and maintenance. Trail O&M Considerations offer a general starting point and will likely be adapted to reflect financial limitations and specific district, forest, or regional circumstances. The broad guidance outlined below reflects “typical” considerations for trails in different Trail Classes:

| Trail Attributes | Trail Class 1 Minimal/Undeveloped Trail | Trail Class 2 Simple/Minor Development Trail | Trail Class 3 Developed/Improved Trail | Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail | Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| Trail Management | Typically managed to accommodate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low use levels. Highly skilled users, comfortable off-trail. Users with high degree of orienteering skill. Some travel modes and ability levels may be impractical or impossible, and may not be encouraged. Water Trails: Users require high level of navigation/orientation and paddling skills. | Typically managed to accommodate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-to-moderate use levels Mid-to-highly skilled users, capable of traveling over awkward condition/obstacles Users with moderate orienteering skill. Trail suitable for many user types, but challenging and involves advanced skills. Water Trails: Moderate to high level of navigation/orientation and paddling/piloting skills required. | Typically managed to accommodate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate to heavy use. Users with intermediate skill level and experience. Users with minimal orienteering skills . Moderately easy travel by managed use types. Random potential for accessible use. Water Trails: Basic to moderate navigation and paddling/piloting skills required. | Typically managed to accommodate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very heavy use. Users with minimal skills and experience. Users with minimal or no orienteering skills. Easy/comfortable travel by managed use types May be (or has potential to be made) accessible. Water Trails: Basic navigation and paddling/piloting skills required. | Typically managed to accommodate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive use. Users with limited trail skills and experience. Trail typically meets agency requirements for accessibility Includes “Pedestrian Trails”. |
| Maintenance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource protection. Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource protection. Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource protection. User convenience. Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> User comfort and ease. Resource Protection. Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> User comfort and ease. Targeted high level of accessibility to key recreational opportunities. Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience. |
| Maintenance Frequency & Intensity** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrequent or no scheduled recurring maintenance. Maintenance interval is typically 5 or more years, or in response to reports of unusual resource problems requiring repair. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance scheduled to preserve the trail facility and route location. Maintenance interval typically 3-5 years, or in response to reports of unusual problems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trail cleared to make available for use early in use season, and to preserve trail integrity. Maintenance interval typically 1-3 years, or in response to reports of trail or resource damage or significant obstacles to managed use type and experience level. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trail cleared to make available for use at earliest opportunity in use season. Typically, maintenance performed at least annually. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance performed at least annually, or as needed to meet posted conditions. Major damage or safety concerns (outside of UA conditions posted at trailhead) typically corrected or posted <24 hours of notice. |

** See Trail Condition Assessment Survey Matrix (CASM) for survey interval and intensity.